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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to determine the effect of role playing behavior as a variable in persuasive communication. Subjects were 52 male college students who were divided into two groups: those who held favorable attitudes toward the speech topic were assigned the role of speakers, and those who responded negatively toward the topics were assigned the role of listeners. Experimental conditions were operationalized through three assigned tasks: (1) the speaker predicted the listener's role attitudes toward the speech which he would later deliver; (2) the speaker compared responses indicative of complete agreement for each attitude item with those of the listener; and (3) the speaker constructed the speech. It was concluded from the tables that role taking may be a significant factor in persuasive communication. Further studies to identify variables that contribute to role playing activity are suggested. (TS)

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Knowledge of Listener Attitude Related to Role Taking and Attitude Change

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Since the contributions of George Herbert Mead to Communication theory, researchers of the social sciences have become interested in role taking behavior. Simply stated, role taking includes an individual's ability to predict the role attitudes of another, compare those attitudes with his own, and use this information to adapt in some way to the other. Previous research (see Flavel, 1968 for an exhaustive review of research relevant to role taking from the developmental point of view) indicates that role taking facilitates self development and development of communication skills among children. This experiment was undertaken to investigate Mead's role taking concept as an intervening variable in persuasive communication. The question under investigation was the following: How does a speaker's ability to take the role of a listener in dyadic communication affect that speaker's ability to persuade a listener?

A review of research relevant to role taking behavior as a variable in persuasive communication was undertaken and no direct answer to the question was found. Some variables commonly associated with role taking within the context of communicative interaction include: Length of message (Kaplan, Werner and Kaplan in Flavel, 1968, pp. 3607; Krauss et al in Hoppe, Milton and Simmel, 1970); the number and kinds of arguments supplied by a communicator (Flavel et al, 1968, pp. 135-47); ability of S to provide elaboration and explanation when requested by auditors (Leavitt & Mueller and Maclay & Newman in Flavel, 1968, pp. 37-8); and persuasive effectiveness (Flavel et al, 1968, pp. 135-47). Implication from these results is severly limited, however, since children (four to eighteen years) constituted the subject samples and age was frequently the only independent variable.

METHOD

Subject Sample: Subjects were 52 male college students enrolled in Fundamentals of Speech 10000 at Kent State University during Fall quarter, 1972-3 academic

year. An attitude test was employed in the selection of S's. Subjects were divided into two groups as either speaker or listener: S's who held favorable attitudes toward the speech topic were assigned to the role of speaker. Those S's who responded negatively toward the topic were assigned the role of listeners. The resulting 27 (speaker-listener) pairs were subdivided into a 14 dyad Prior knowledge of listener role attitude group and a 13 dyad No prior knowledge group. Ideally, speakers and listeners would have been randomly assigned to dyads. It was impossible to utilize random assignments in this experiment due to insurmountable schedule conflicts among subjects. Therefore within a given section subjects were paired and the experiment was performed during the class hour. Through the cooperation of the instructors, students were permitted to leave class.

Procedure: Experimental conditions were operationalized through tasks assigned speakers of each group by E. The prior knowledge of Listener Role Attitude speakers were assigned three tasks. The first task was the speaker's prediction (before interaction) of his listener's "role attitudes" toward the speech the speaker constructed and delivered to his listener. The listener's responses to an attitude pretest about the topic were supplied the speaker so he could understand how his listener responded to several questions related to the subject of the speech. The speaker was provided data indicative of listener attitudes toward his speech topic prior to the delivery of that speech. This was done to facilitate the speaker's "prediction" of role attitude for the Prior Knowledge condition.

A post test of the prediction of role attitude for the Prior knowledge condition required the speaker to respond to the attitude scale from his listener's point of view. A correlation between the speakers' and listeners' post test scores was interpreted to be an indication of speaker during the speech event in the Prior knowledge condition.

The second task (Prior knowledge condition) was a "role attitude comparison."

The speaker was instructed to compare responses indicative of complete agreement for each attitude item with those of his listener. He executed this task by reading the item and noting those attitudes which need persuasion (i.e. evident difference between speaker and listener attitude). The speaker was instructed that he should select more data (during the third task) to support attitudes with which his listener disagree than for attitudes on which there already is speaker-listener agreement.

The third task (Prior knowledge condition) was the construction of the speech (by the speaker from materials provided him by E* The speaker was instructed to use whatever claims and data (the material was appropriately labeled) he believed essential to evoke his listener's agreement with the statement that "There was frequent travel to America from the Old World before Columbus or the Vikings.

The statement of the speech's central idea was presented to the speaker on a yellow note card. Claims to support the central idea were provided on red note cards and data were provided on white note cards. The speaker was allowed thirty minutes to select data and claims, and practice his speech. He (speaker) was instructed that he could use the note cards he had selected for his speech in the actual speech event. The number of note cards chosen by each speaker was recorded to determine if there was any difference in the number of cards chosen by the Prior Knowledge speaker and the number chosen by the No Prior Knowledge speaker. No significant differences in number of cards chosen between experimental conditions was presumed to evidence a lack of speaker adjustment to his listener.

The "No Prior Knowledge" condition was quite different from the Prior Knowledge condition. In this condition the speaker was directed to construct

* The central idea, data and claims were taken from Before Columbus: Links between the Old World and Ancient America by Cyrus H. Gordon.

a speech from the claim and data cards provided him by E on the topic, "There was frequent travel to America from the Old World before Columbus or the Viking." The speaker was instructed that the experiment was a test of his ability to persuade his listener using provided materials. He was also told he had been selected a speaker on the basis of his general agreement with the speech topic as indicated by his attitude pretest responses. The speaker was told that he had thirty minutes to select his data and claims, and practice his speech. The number of note cards selected for the speech was recorded and tested against the number chosen by Prior Knowledge conditions speaker.

As noted above, it was predicted that sore thinking behavior positively affects speaker persuasiveness. Speaker persuasiveness operationalized by means of a pretest and post test measure of "listener role attitudes" toward the speech delivered in the experimental treatment. The attitude scale* (used in this measure consisted of the claims and data available to the speaker to support the speech's central idea. A five point likert scale was employed to indicate agree-disagree differences in attitudes.

During the pretest, both the speakers and the listeners attitudes were measured and the speaker and listener roles were assigned to insure that a nominal agree-disagree difference of attitude existed between each speaker and each listener. In the post test the listener was again asked to provide his attitudes. The difference between the pretest-post test listner responses was considered indicative of speaker persuasiveness.

The instructions for listeners remained constant regardless of the condition in which they participated. The listener was instructed not to speak with the other member of the dyad. The listener was urged to attend to the speech just as if he were listening to a speech in class.

Statistic: The Wilcoxon matched pairs signed-ranks test and a Kolmogorov-

* A Test-Retest Reliability check upon the Attitude questionnaire was conducted (N=39), and a correlation of .8422 was found.

Smirnov two sample test were used for the pretest-post test measure of listener attitude. The independent test was used to measure difference in number of cards selected between high role taking behavior and low role taking behavior conditions. Kendall's T and A Mann Whitney test were used to measure speaker's ability to predict listener attitude after speech interaction. The next chapter reports the data collected from the dyads and the results of the analysis performed on it.

RESULTS

Several tests were conducted to measure role taking behavior across the two experimental conditions. First the number of note cards (claims and proofs) provided by speakers was tallied. As table I indicates, Prior Knowledge speakers provided 28.15 cards while No Prior knowledge speakers provided 24.31 cards, the t with 25 degrees of freedom was .531. This t value was not significant. The subjects in the two different role taking conditions did not differ in the number of cards used in constructing their messages.

TABLE I

The mean number of cards employed by speakers and the independent t value measuring the difference between means across conditions.

Conditions	Mean Number of Cards	t value	Degrees of Freedom
Prior knowledge	28.15	.531	25 not significant*
No Prior knowledge	24.31		

*d=.05

The speaker's ability to predict his listener's attitude immediately after communication was the second test of role taking behavior. The results are provided in Table 2. In the Prior knowledge condition a Kendell's Tau of .308 was observed. In the No Prior knowledge condition a Tau of .577 was observed. Although the correlation of the Prior knowledge only approaches significance, the Tau of the No Prior knowledge condition was significant. Hence there was more concordance

among speakers and listeners where there was no Prior knowledge of listener role attitude than among speakers and listeners where there was Prior knowledge of listener role attitude among speakers.

TABLE II

The correlation between speaker's prediction of listener attitude and listener's attitude following communication.

Conditions	Correlation	Z Score	Probability
Prior knowledge	.308	1.47	$p < .07$ not significant
No Prior knowledge	.577	2.75	$p < .003$ significant*

*d=.05

In a further investigation of the difference between the correlations reported above, a Mann Whitney U test was conducted to determine whether the speaker prediction-listener attitude difference was significantly different between the Prior knowledge and No Prior knowledge conditions. The difference (U=83) was not significant. Both correlations, therefore, might be considered significant.

Two tests were conducted to measure speaker persuasiveness. The null hypothesis predicted no difference in attitude change across conditions. First, a Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test was conducted to measure attitude change in each experimental condition. The Wilcoxon test revealed a T of 1 for both the high and low role taking conditions. This result was significant (p .005) and indicated persuasion in each condition. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov two-sample test was conducted to determine whether there was any difference in persuasion between the high and low conditions. There was no difference in speaker persuasiveness across conditions.

DISCUSSION

The speaker's possession of prior knowledge of listener role attitude did not enhance role taking effectiveness. This observation was based upon two

measures instituted to check the manipulation of role taking behavior across conditions: Number of note cards used by speakers during communication, and a correlation between speaker prediction of listener role attitude following interaction and listener post test attitude. If prior knowledge of listener role attitude had facilitated role taking, speakers of the prior knowledge condition should have selected and used significantly more note cards than did no prior knowledge speakers. No significant difference in the number of cards used was observed ($t = .53$). Awareness of listener disagreement relevant to speech topic, therefore, did not significantly increase the amount of data and claims provided by prior knowledge speakers as compared to the number provided by no prior knowledge speakers.

Although prior knowledge of listener role attitude did not significantly manipulate role taking, some aspect of dyadic interaction must have provided effective data for role taking behavior. Speakers of the no prior knowledge condition were quite effective in predicting listener role attitude post communication (Tau $= .58$)* while prior knowledge speakers evidenced only limited effectiveness in prediction of listener response to communication (Tau $= .31$).** Since the pre-communication manipulation (prior knowledge) did not work, and significant evidence of role taking behavior (the prediction correlations) immediately following communication was obtained, it may well have been the personal interaction during dyadic communication that provided effective data for role taking behavior.

If this were the case, it would follow that the role taking effect was not differentially manipulated because speakers of both conditions were exposed to "other" role data during communication. Accordingly, it would appear that knowledge of listener role attitude prior to communication (as operationalized in this experiment) was not a significant function of the role taking process.

*Significant at $p < .003$

**Approached significance at $p < .07$

It was the act of interpersonal communication that provided speaker effective data for role taking behavior.

Finally, the results indicate that role taking behavior positively affects speaker persuasiveness. Significant attitude change (p .005) was observed in both experimental conditions, and, again, there was evidence of role taking activity in both conditions. Of course, the difficulty remains that no control condition was operationalized. Consequently, it would be inappropriate to attribute the significant attitude change primarily to role taking. Contaminating variables probably intervened. However, in a dyadic communication setting wherein significant role taking activity was observed, significant attitude change was measured. In view of this data, it appears that role taking behavior (to some degree) positively affects speaker persuasiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

The ability to take the role of the other may be a significant function in persuasive communication. Although prior knowledge of listener role attitude did not affect the number of data and claims (note cards) used by speaker during communication, evidence of significant role taking activity was observed in both experimental conditions. Extreme attitude change was also measured for both experimental conditions. It could not be discounted that conclusive evidence of role taking behavior was linked to profound speaker persuasiveness. Accordingly, it was concluded that role taking behavior was linked to profound speaker persuasiveness. Accordingly, it was concluded that role taking behavior (to some degree) affected speaker persuasiveness in dyadic communication.

IMPLICATIONS

Despite the limitations of this exploratory study, the results point toward the importance of role taking behavior an an intervening variable in persuasive communication. Reviewing the results of this experiment, several suggestions for

further investigation arise. First, the failure impotency of the prior knowledge manipulation may be attributable to insufficient listener role data provided prior knowledge condition speakers. Audience analysis prior to interaction may be important when sufficient audience relevant data is provided. In this study only listener topic relevant attitude was provided. Secondly, more information is needed to identify variables during interaction that contribute to role taking activity. Perhaps role taking functions only within the context of interpersonal communication. Consequently, the manipulation of face-to-face interaction may affect the ability to take the role of an auditor. Finally, the manipulation of role taking activity during persuasive communication may increase our knowledge of the function of role taking during persuasive communication. If tole taking is an important variable in persuasiveness communication, much compelling research needs to be done. At present, it can only be suggested that role taking behavior may be an important variable in persuasive communication.

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